

Update on the George Washington National Forest Plan Revision

March 25, 2010

When we published our Notice of Intent to prepare the Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan on March 10, 2010, we made a strong effort to try to get as much background information as possible on this web page. After catching our breath, reviewing the web page and speaking with some folks, we realized that we needed to explain a little more about the comment period and what is on the web page.

Comment Period

In the Notice of Intent (NOI) we announced that we are going to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the 1982 planning regulations and we asked for your comments by May 7, 2010 on ‘the scope of the analysis as presented in the NOI and on our website.’ Then we put a large number of new documents and maps on our website. We would like to assure you that we are not seeking comment on everything; nor is this comment period the only time we will accept your comments. The primary objective for this particular comment period is to identify the significant issues and alternatives for management direction that addresses those significant issues. This will drive the analyses needed for the EIS. The purpose of the EIS is to inform the decision-maker and the public about the trade-offs and environmental effects of the alternatives being considered for the revised Forest Plan. The EIS will evaluate the consequences of the broad-scale planning decisions of the Forest Plan. A more detailed analysis of the site-specific effects of implementing the plan will occur later during on-the-ground project planning.

But...we also acknowledge that many of you have already invested a lot of effort in telling us what you feel the significant issues are during the last several years. You’ve come to past workshops, listened to other viewpoints, and worked on ways to address what needs to change. Therefore, we compiled what we’ve heard into plan revision language and refer to it as the “Need for Change” alternative. A number of the documents under the Key Documents page present what this alternative could look like in a Forest Plan. Although we are initially seeking comments between now and May 7 that will help us develop the EIS through determining significant issues and alternatives, we will certainly consider comments at any time and on any aspect of the planning process.

Public Workshops in April

We are planning five workshops around various locations on the Forest that will have the same format and objective (see the Public Involvement page for dates and locations). Our objective at the workshops will be to determine the significant issues and potential alternatives to address those issues. We will begin with an overview of where we are in the planning process now and the analyses we have done or are working on. We’ll follow that with a discussion of issues and

then break into groups to talk about different ways to address some of the more significant issues, which will help us develop alternatives.

Website: Public Involvement Section

The Public Involvement icon leads to information on past public meetings and notices of upcoming public meetings. We began revising the Forest Plan in 2006 and had our first round of public meetings in 2007. In the public meetings since 2007 we have had discussions about what people wanted to see changed in the management of the Forest. We have summaries of these meetings, background information used at the meetings, and comments from the meetings. We also have copies of the written comments that we have received and summaries of some of the early comments. All of this information can help you to understand some of the main issues and topics that other interested folks have identified as important aspects of the planning process.

Website: Key Documents Section

There are several sections under this icon. The first is a link to the [Notice of Intent \(March 2010\)](#) (NOI). The NOI is the formal process of initiating the development of an Environmental Impact Statement. It is published in the Federal Register. The issuance of the NOI starts the scoping process. “Scoping” is the term used to describe the process of determining the scope of the issues to be addressed in the EIS and identifying the significant issues related to a proposal.

The next section is “Scoping Background Materials.” These are documents that may help you as you prepare your comments. Much of the information related to Forest Desired Conditions, Management Prescription Area descriptions, Forest-wide Standards, and Suitable Uses are building blocks that may not vary that much among alternatives. What would vary is which of these Management Prescription Areas we would desire and where would they apply, and the objectives we would want to strive for.

As noted above, we identified a number of needs for change in the Forest Plan during our past public meetings and these are summarized in the Summary of the Need for Change (February 2010). The [Forest Niche \(February 2010\)](#) identifies what makes the Forest unique and the [Forest Desired Conditions \(February 2010\)](#) provides a description of what we want the forest to look like.

A forest plan has standards that provide technical direction and often preclude, or place limitations on, activities or uses. The [Forest-wide Standards \(February 2010\)](#) are adapted from the Jefferson Forest Plan and make a good starting point for discussion of what will work for the GW Revision. The Forest Plan will identify [Management Prescription Areas \(February 2010\)](#) that identify parts of the forest that are emphasized for particular uses or resources. Each management prescription area has a desired condition and standards. We adapted the Jefferson Forest Plan prescription areas and posted them as a starting point for discussion. We also posted a [Crosswalk: 1993 GW Management Areas and Proposed Management Prescription Areas](#)

[\(February 2010\)](#) that identifies each of the proposed Management Prescription Areas with its corresponding Management Area as identified in the current GW Forest Plan. The [Suitable Uses \(February 2010\)](#) table is a summary of the management prescription areas limitations on uses in each area.

The next three documents relate to the needs for change. The [Forest Objectives - Need for Change \(February 2010\)](#) identify the types of objectives that will likely be in the Forest Plan and some quantified objectives that respond to the identified needs for change. The [Summary of Acreage by Management Prescription Area – Need for Change \(February 2010\)](#) and the Map of Management Prescription Areas – Need for Change (February 2010) summarize and display management prescription areas in a way that would address the identified needs for change. The [Map of Lands Suitable for Timber Production- Need for Change \(March 2010\)](#) displays those lands that could be suitable for timber harvest under the need for change alternative.

The next document, [More Emphasis on Remote Recreation and Remote Habitat Alternative \(February 2010\)](#), is a brief summary of another preliminary alternative based on a number of comments that we have received. This is followed by a [Link to Current GW Forest Plan](#), which will be used as another alternative in the EIS.

The Maps section has several maps that display resource information. This information would not change by alternative, but provide important information to be used in plan development.

The Potential Wilderness Inventory and Review section has a number of documents and maps that provide information of the identification of potential wilderness areas and draft evaluations of the areas.

The Analysis of the Management Situation will eventually include benchmark analyses to define the range within which alternatives can be constructed, current levels of goods and services provided by the Forest, projections of demand and a determination of the need to change management direction. Currently the information in this section represents the Forest staff's review of monitoring information and an evaluation of the need for change.

Ecological Analysis will be a very important part of the revision. It will address ecosystem diversity, wildlife and fisheries habitat, species diversity and species viability issues. The posted draft documents provide a current draft list of the ecosystems and species that need to be evaluated and show some of the steps that we will implement to develop plan direction to assure that the needs of the systems and species will be met through Forest Plan direction. Please note one typographical error in the Draft Ecosystem Diversity Report: on page 17 it states "Approximately 186 MMCF (930 MMBF) of commercial timber volume is removed to achieve ecological restoration and forest health objectives". The amount of timber volume should have been blank, like the other objective values in that section.

Conclusion

We posted these documents to assist you in making comments. We do not expect you to review and comment on all of the documents. Some of the documents contain basic information about the Forest, others provide an early view of how we will conduct analyses of various topics, and others provide you some ideas on where we believe we need to focus our attention during revision. Please look at the ones that are in your area of interest. You are welcome to comment on the specific documents, but what we are really after are your thoughts on what we need to address and how we might best take care of the issues that you are concerned with.

Following the April workshops, we will continue to post documents as they become available or updated, including the significant issues and alternatives we will be addressing in the EIS. We anticipate future workshops before putting out a Draft Plan and Draft EIS at the end of the year. Once we put out the Draft Plan and Draft EIS, we will have a formal 90-day comment period. At that time we will request your detailed comments on the Draft Forest Plan documents and Draft EIS.